To Whom Belong the Streets?

Investment in Public Space and Popular Contentions in Late Ottoman Damascus[1]

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Streets as highly refined works of art, enduring and stable products of planning minds and repetitive hands, forgotten voids, and spontaneous openings, are connecting spaces that enable the very existence of any settlement. Without these interlocutors between the secluded amounts of space occupied by the individuals' bodies and their extension, the shelter, bodies could not move, social intercourse would be impossible, and cities were only aggregations of disconnected private places.

In our everyday-language "the street" is the epitome of *public place* and *public space*. The term conveys notions of places open to the non-exclusive use of any member of the society. At the same time, "the street" carries the ugly grimace of collective fury and the homogenous delirium or tranquillity of the masses. Somewhat attenuated, "the street" stands for the public opinion or The Public, with capital letters.

Arguably the main reason for this state of mind is a Western perception of private and public property; an understanding that these physical sites belong to the incorporated and institutionalised entirety of the society. First and foremost they are public places in the sense that no private, individual person owns "the street" as her personal, exclusive, and inalienable property. Yet, everybody's action has inevitably an immediate impact on its appearance, although the extend of this impact is heavily dependent on a variety of factors, which are commonly abbreviated as sets of power relations, discourses, current modes of production, etc.

Unifying these aspects, the social space of the "street", as both public *place* and public *space*, is at the ever-changing intersection of material, mental, and lived spaces. Physical streets are conditioned by the social practices and perceptions of their users and in turn they condition these very practices and imaginations. "Unlike works of art–or even certain buildings, which have a more determinate existence–streets are as mutable as life itself

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1. The presented questions and cases are preliminary findings within a larger PhD project covering the whole of Abdülhamit II's reign and the Young Turk era until the beginning of the first World War.

and are subject to constant alterations through design or use that foil the historian's desire to give them categorical finitude."[2]

As social spaces they are produced in the true sense of the word, that is, they are the outcome of human practices, which are, though individually performed, highly repetitive. This is true for the work of the builders, rituals of affirmation and contestation, as well as the daily movements of the people. The quality of Damascus' urban space is not only determined by the material environment and powerful individuals but depends largely on changing social practices of the city's inhabitants: the way in which townspeople use particular spaces, and their perceptions of the city and themselves. Following Henry Lefebvre, I conceptualise any social space as the produced and producing encounter of a triad of spaces: the built and material structures (*conceived space*), the immediate social practices (*lived space*), and the peoples' perceptions and imaginations of the other two (*perceived space*). Social space therefore should be seen as a changing set of relations rather than a fixed object or an empty container.[3] Being dependent on the actions of mortals, (social) space is bound to change over time and thus the subject of historical analysis.

The question, "To whom belong the streets?", then, aims at scrutinising the negotiation of individual and communal *property* (legal ownership), of *propriety* (norms and customs), and of *appropriation* (social practice). Such negotiations involve the direct physical and brutal occupation of limited amounts of physical space, always with the concrete meaning of prohibiting competing practices, and the more sublime, though not less powerful and in many cases more enduring, appropriation of the public opinion.

In order to scrutinise these negotiations, *space* and *place* have to be further differentiated. The applicability of "space" will be limited to broader notions of abstract concepts (which can exist in the singular). A public sphere and imagined communities that transgress mere face-to-face relationships fall into this category. "Place", on the other hand, refers to a limited amount of physical *space* within the city and has to be surrounded by neighbouring *places*. Following Lefebvre and de Certeau,[4] place is then understood as a quality of topographical sites and locations that is shaped and delineated by ever-changing human social practices. Thus, public *places* are physical sites of social interaction in which certain perceptions of a public *space* are enacted and reified. As such they are subject to both *strategies* of the powerful strata and *tactics* of the subaltern classes. Whereas the former actively invested in public *space* through building projects,[5] institutions, and ritualised practices that had a vital impact on the entire urban society, the latter appropriated these very *places* for their own political ends.

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2. Çelik, Favro & Ingersoll 1996, p. 1.

3. Lefebvre 1991 [1974], esp. p. 33, 38-41.

4. De Certeau 1984 [1980]; Lefebvre 1991 [1974]; Mayol 1998 [1980].

5. Weber 1998, 2005, 2009a; Hudson 2006, 2008.

In the context of late 19th century Damascus, the question, "To whom belong the streets?", investigates the nature of public places and public spaces, when the streets were no public property,[6], and when The Public as an incorporated society of citizens did not yet exist. I will do so against the backdrop of four short case studies: Sunni women violently protesting at the seat of Ottoman power; members of two Christian communities clashing over the usufruct of a cemetery and the media discourse about the clashes; and the coincidence of oppositional placards being posted at strategic locations with graduation ceremonies at various schools throughout the city.

The Setting: Damascus In the Last Quarter of the 19th Century

In the late 19th century, Damascus, despite remaining a provincial capital with civil and military imperial institutions at all administrative levels, increasingly lost its economic and political importance to the rising port city of Beirut. Having hitherto depended on overland trade routes and textile manufacture, the spread of steamship and railroad services, the opening of the Suez Canal, and the industrial production of yarns and fabrics, dealt serious blows to the city.[7] The fertile areas of the Ḥawrān to South, which most of the city's grain supplies relied on, were constantly shaken by uprisings of its Druze population.[8]

Shaped like a panhandle and surrounded by the fertile oasis of the Ġūṭa, by 1880 the city was home to a population of at least 120.000 people.[9] Alongside a Sunni majority lived townspeople from among eleven officially recognized Non-Muslim religious affiliations, various Sufi orders, considerable Shiite and Druze minorities, and a handful of Europeans,[10] in addition to officials, officers, and troops from all around the empire, as well as half-nomadic Bedouins, pilgrims, and refugees from the Balkan wars. Most of these communities spoke their own languages or idioms: Arabic, Turkish, Greek, Armenian, Kurdish, Bulgarian,

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6. See Art. 92 of the 1868 Land Code; Arazi Kanunnamesi. Düstur 1 1289 aH [1872/3], p. 165-199. Compare Mundy & Smith 2007, p. 5, 11-52, especially p. 46.

7. HCPP [House of Commons, UK, Parliamentary Papers] C.1993 Jago *Commercial Report Damascus 1877*, Apr. 1878, p. 514, FO [National Archives, UK, Foreign Office Series] 78/3016 Damascus, *Report on Persian Trade*, Jago 6 Nov. 1879, Handelsarchiv [Preussisches Handelsarchiv] 27 Aug. 1880, p. 232-233; Rafeq 1983. On the Vilayet Law of 1864 and the administrative structure of the province see Salībā 1971; Karpat 1985, p. 8; Groiss 1994, p. 40; Deguilhem 2005, p. 57. On the break-away of Beirut in 1888 and the new administrative structure of the two provinces see PA AA [Politisches Archiv, Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin] R252361 Beirut K.No.28, Reitz to von Bismarck 20 Mar. 1888, PA AA R252361 Beirut K.No.91, Schroeder to von Bismarck 24 Dec. 1888, Hanssen 2005, p. 51.

8. E.g. in January 1878, October-November 1879, and February-May 1881; FO 226/197 Damascus 3, Jago to Layard 6 Feb. 1878; Lisān [al-Ḥāl] 28 Oct. 1879, p. 3-4; Bašīr 7 Nov. 1879, p. 4; Kurd ʿAlī 1969, p. 102-103; Lisān 7 Feb. 1881, p. 1 until Lisān 19 May 1881, p. 1.

9. Mc Carthy 1981, p. 17-18 computes 123.897 inhabitants for 1885/6 on the basis of the *salname* and a statistical correction factor. The Ottoman census of 1881-1893 reports 114.277 people; Karpat 1985; p. 134-135; Qassāṭlī 2004 [1879], p. 25-27 estimates c.143.000 inhabitants for 1879 and notes that he does not believe in estimates of 160.000 people. HCPP C.2577 Jago *Commercial Report Damascus 1879*, Jun. 1880, p. 1000 provides an estimate of 180.000 people whereas German diplomatic sources speak of c.150.000 to c.200.000 inhabitants for the city and its vicinity; PA AA R252424 Beirut 8, Weber to Delbrueck 29 Jan. 1870, PA AA R252359 Beirut, *Bericht über die Handelsverhältnisse Syriens im Jahr 1882*, Schroeder to von Bismarck 6 Aug. 1883.

10. Salname Suriye 15 1300 aH [1882/83], p. 254-255; Qassāṭlī 2004 [1879], p. 26-27.

Ladino, and Syriac, to name the more common ones. Though some of these groups were concentrated in clearly identified areas, such as the Christian quarters of Bāb Tūmā and the lower Mīdān, the Jewish quarter south east of Bāb Tūmā, or the Kurdish quarter in Ṣāliḥiyya, none of these quarters was exclusively inhabited by any one of them;[11] neither were the various crafts and trades the townspeople engaged in exclusively allotted by religious affiliation.[12]

Since the end of the Egyptian rule in 1840 and the introduction of the *Tanẓimāt*, the city witnessed the rise of a new class of Muslim landowning notable families holding most of the posts in the new administrative bodies,[13] as well as the emergence of a small literate middle class that engaged in various (literary) clubs and societies.[14] The members of these strata, together with the imperial officials and military officers, inhabited the "Ottoman area" north west of the walled city and, given they were Christian, some parts of Bāb Tūmā, while the old high *ʿulamāʾ* and notable families occupied spacious houses in the "central rectangle" around the Umayyad Mosque and the Suqs.[15]

The townspeople's practices and thus the quality of its spaces revolved around various rhythms: over the course of night and day, with manual labour lasting from dawn till dusk and heavily restricted movement at night by the means of gated neighbourhoods and very limited, if not absent, street lighting;[16] over the course of the week, with Fridays differing from the other days by ritual practices of the population's Muslim majority concentrated in and around the Umayyad Mosque and summery Sunday nights when the quarter of Bāb Tūmā was bustling with alcoholised people;[17] over the course of the year around major events such as the month of Ramaḍān, the annual Pilgrimage to Mecca, Easter and Passover festivities or the arrival of the new harvest in June.

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11. Sāmī 1981 [1896]; p. 73-74, Grehan 2007; for Bāb Tūmā and the Jewish quarter see al-Qattan 2002; for the Mīdān see Marino 1997, p. 291-296.

12. Only very few crafts were dominated by members of particular religious affiliations; e.g. al-Qāsimī 1960, p. 118; al-Qāsimī & al-ʿAẓm 1960, p. 239.

13. HCPP C.2577 Jago *Commercial Report Damascus 1879*, Jun. 1880, p. 1005; Reilly 1989, 1992. On administrative reform see Ma'oz 1968; Salībā 1971; Gross 1979. On the "tradition" of local government as the basis for the municipal councils (*baladiyya*) see Lafi 2002.

14. E.g. Lisān 24 Oct. 1878, p. 4, 14 Dec. 1878, p. 1; for a conceptualisation of emerging modern middle classes in Aleppo and Beirut see Hanssen 2005; Watenpaugh 2006; Hobsbawm 1994 [1987], p. 174 conceives three criteria for a middle class or bourgeoisie identity by late 19th century, providing a hierarchy of exclusiveness; the most important being formal education, which demonstrated "that adolescents were able to postpone earning a living."

15. Schatkowski Schilcher 1985, p. 12-14.

16. Von Kremer 1854, p. 17-18; Mackintosh 1883, p. 16, 77; al-Qāsimī 1960, p. 58, 88-58, 89; Wedewer 2004 [1887], p. 232; Sāmī 1981 [1896], p. 78 observes in 1890 that all shops had to be closed two ours after sunset. Neighbourhood gates were at least absent from the quarters of Bāb Tūmā after the post-1868 reconstructions.

17. Lisān 7 Jun. 1880, p. 4; Lisān 17 Jun. 1880, p. 4; Lisān 29 Jul. 1880, p. 4, FO 195/2144 Damascus 59, *Quarterly Report*, Monahan to O'Conor 8 Jul. 1903.

Intermezzo: Sources

Thanks to the work of archaeologists, art historians, and urban planners we have large guides to the city's splendorous and durable (stone) buildings, yet the use these *conceived spaces* had been put to and the popular quarters have not received the necessary attention.[18] Political and social histories of Damascus emphasise the role of individuals from the ruling and power holding elites and centre on narratives of emerging middle classes, nationalisms, and Islamic reform movements.[19] It must be borne in mind that social practices as an often neglected aspect of urban history of the Middle East are not limited to the commoners' everyday lives – although social and everyday-life history is often equated with a history from below. Introducing the agency of the supposedly powerless to our analysis of the processes shaping urban space, offers the context within which the history of ideas, concepts, or architecture should be situated. Yet, one has to acknowledge that their actions were severely limited by structures set through practices of more powerful agents and hegemonic discourses, and since the surviving sources were all written by members of the more powerful strata, the individuality and intentionality of most of the townspeople remains beyond our epistemological reach. Considering further that in many cases the have-nots take centre stage only in times of social unrest, one is left to write a collective or even structural biography of the social groups involved.[20]

The main sources for the social practices depicted in this paper are Arabic newspapers and journals published in Beirut, alongside the British, American, and German consular reports, Ottoman yearbooks for the province of Syria, and local historiographic accounts. In the period under study only two newspapers were published in Damascus: the official *Suriye* and the private *Dimašq*.[21] Unfortunately, copies of these papers from the years under study have not survived. However, the press in the neighbouring city of Beirut flourished and published articles about and from Damascus on a regular basis.[22] This vast body of regular reports (of varying quality and detail) over the entire reign of Abdülhamit II provides us with a yet untapped source of the social and political history of Damascus, often reporting events and details not covered by either the consular reports or much later written memoirs.

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18. Watzinger & Wulzinger 1924; Sauvaget 1932, 1934; Elisséeff 1965, 1970; Sack 1985, 1989; Weber 1998, 2004, 2005, 2009a, 2009b; Hudson 2006.

19. E.g. Gross 1979; Khoury 1983; Schatkowski Schilcher 1985; Commins 1986; Sack 1989; Hudson 2006; Weber 2009a.

20. Compare Cronin 2008.

21. Both were published weekly in Arabic and Ottoman; *Suriye* since 1865 and *Dimašq* with interruptions from January 1878 onwards; Lisān 7 Jan. 1878, p. 4; Bašīr 11 Jan. 1878, p. 4; Salname Suriye 14 1299 aH [1881/82], p. 285-286, Ṭarrāzī 1913a, p. 198-199, 1933, p. 42-43; the publication of *Dimašq* resumed in August 1879 after some months of being banned by the censors Lisān 4 Aug. 1879, p. 1, Bašīr 14 Aug. 1879, p. 4; Muqtaṭaf 4 (4), Sep. 1879, p. 116. Surviving collections of Suriye between 1882-88 and 1900-03 can be found at the American University Beirut and Bayezit Devlet Kütüphanesi in Istanbul respectively.

22. Ayalon 1995, p. 28-46. For a list of published Arabic journals and newspapers see Ṭarrāzī 1913a, 1913b, 1914, 1933.

The present article employs three of the eight newspapers published in Beirut between 1877 and 1882:[23] the leading privately owned bi-weekly *Lisān al-Ḥāl* (The Voice of the Present), issued by Ḫalīl Sarkīs every Monday and Thursday, *al-Bašīr* (The Herald), issued every Friday by the Jesuit publishing house, and, to a lesser extend, the (bi)weekly *Ṯamarāt al-Funūn* (Fruits of Knowledge), published every Thursday (Monday and Thursday from August 1878 onwards) by the Islamic benevolent society *Ǧamʿiyyat al-Funūn* under the editorship of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Qabbānī.[24] Exact numbers of circulation are not known, but the "Preussisches Handelsarchiv" reported in 1878 between 500 and 660 subscribers for each newspaper.[25] Throughout the years under survey letters from readers and correspondents at Damascus were published in about every second issue of *Lisān al-Ḥāl* and *al-Bašīr* and less frequently in *Ṯamarāt al-Funūn.*

During the period under study the press in Beirut remained relatively free in their coverage, constantly criticising corrupt (and always subaltern) officials. Despite the general tightening of censorship since the Ottoman-Russian war and the accession of Abdülhamit II (1876-1909), the more rigid press laws were not enforced in the Province of Syria until the end of Midhat Paşa's governorship (Aug.1880).[26] Yet, particularly on the local and regional level and even more so in these early years of their publication, when state sponsored schools were still a hearsay and economic crisis reduced many people to starvation, newspapers were most definitely neither the sole nor the main purveyor of news. Although *Lisān al-Ḥāl* and *al-Bašīr* were published by Christians, a particularly Christian attitude becomes only apparent in some of *al-Bašīr*'s publications.[27] Against the background of the delicate sectarian composition of Beirut and the surrounding Mount Lebanon, the newspapers tend to distance themselves from particular religious judgements on current and local events. However, one can observe a focus on incidents with a certain importance for the Christian communities in their reports from Damascus, which has the effect that information on Muslim communal life is underrepresented.

Despite their limitations, the newspapers complement the consular reports often focusing solely on spectacular events in providing otherwise lost voices, details on

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23. For a list of published journals in the Province of Syria see Salname Suriye 14 1299 aH [1881/82], p. 286.

24. Handelsarchiv 6 Dec. 1878, p. 580; Ṭarrāzī 1913b, p. 11-8, 27-33; Cioeta 1982, p. 43-44; Ayalon 1995, p. 34-37.

25. Handelsarchiv 6 Dec. 1878; p. 580; these numbers are congruent with Ayalon 1995, p. 145-152, according to whom it seems reasonable to assume that not more than a few hundred copies were printed per issue.

26. Cioeta 1979, p. 172. This is still the only study on censorship in Ottoman Syria and Lebanon. It is limited in its scope by the focus on the warnings published in *Ṯamarāt al-Funūn.* Such warnings, however, were only published after newspapers ignored the requests of the censor over whose desk every article was meant to pass before publication; on the details of the procedure see Bašīr 3 Aug. 1889, p. 1-2. Thus, the issue of tacit internalisation of censorship and a probably shared belief in what is worth reporting, are unaccounted for. The same is true for the actual implementation of the censor's verdict, which go unchecked. In addition, the tables in the appendix of Cioeta's article have to be read with caution, as, for instance, *Lisān al-Ḥāl* was not suspended at any time in 1878 (p.181), and *al-Ǧanna,* according to the referenced source, was only banned after its issue 1508 of 29 Sep 1885 and not on 19 April (p.182).

27. E.g. on the Papal opinion on the Treaty of Berlin, Bašīr 9 Aug. 1878, p. 1.

quotidian practices and local prices, as well as ample depictions of a local urban society intertwined with imperial metaphors of power as conceived of by the elites and the regular performances transforming such perceptions into the *lived space* of the city.

The Bread Riot

On 29 March 1878, "The Levant Herald" in Constantinople printed a letter from their correspondent in Beirut, dated 18 March, reporting that in a daily manner poor female protestors take to the streets and the Governor's palace in Damascus in demand for lower bread prices:

> "La plus grande misère règne à Damas. Des troupes de femmes affamées envahissent chaque jour les alentours du palais du gouverneur en criant sous les fenêtres du *vali*: 'Donnez-nous du pain! Donnez-nous du pain!'[28]"

In the preceding months the city had come to an economic standstill. Hit by a cholera epidemic in 1875,[29] exceptionally harsh winters, and bad harvests in the late 1870s,[30] heavy taxation and conscription during the Balkan Crisis of 1876/77[31] and the ensuing Ottoman-Russian war of 1877/78[32] had brought the Empire to the brink of collapse and resulted in astronomical prices for basic commodities.[33] Three quarters of the population were considered to be poor by contemporaneous standards and on the verge of starvation,[34] which led some of the most destitute to sell not just their material belongings but their children.[35] The streets were increasingly crowded with beggars, pickpockets, peddlers, prostitutes,[36] and ten thousands of dogs responsible for clearing the streets of rubbish.[37]

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28. Levant Herald [The Levant Herald/ Constantinople Messenger] 29 Mar. 1878, p. 3.

29. Most of the Christian and Jewish population fled to the mountains. The epidemic claimed c.9.000 lives; Times [The Times, London] 19 Oct. 1875, p. 7, 18 Jul. 1883, p. 5, HCPP C.1662 Dickson *Commercial Report Damascus 1875-6*, Mar. 1877, p. 219, Qassāṭlī 2004 [1879], p. 154-155.

30. E.g. 1877/78 and 1879/80; Lisān 14 Feb. 1878, p. 4, 5 Jan. 1880, p. 1, 15 Mar. 1880, p. 2; Qassāṭlī 2004 [1879], p. 155; Muqtaṭaf 4 (8), Jan. 1880, p. 224, Feb. 1880, 4(9), p. 254-6, FO 78/3130 Damascus 5, Jago to Layard 20 Apr. 1880, al-Qāsimī & al-ʿAẓm 1960.

31. Gross 1979, p. 216-221.

32. FO 78/2850 Damascus political 5, Jago to Earl of Derby 27 Mar. 1878. Most issues of *Lisān al-Ḥāl, al-Bašīr, Ṯamarāt al-Funūn,* and *al-Ǧinān* were predominantly occupied with the back and forth of this war and the succeeding treaties between April 1877 and August 1878.

33. E.g. in spring 1877 and 1878; Bašīr 24 Apr. 1878, p. 4, HCPP C.1993 Jago *Commercial Report Damascus 1877*, Apr. 1878, p. 516.

34. Lisān 11 Feb. 1878, p. 4, 2 Jan. 1879, p. 4.

35. FO 195/1201 Beirut Pol.14, Eldridge to Earl of Derby 28 Feb. 1878, MECA [Middle East Centre Archive, St Antony's College, Oxford] GB165-0086 Damascus, Dickson *Journal 1882-1885*, 30 Nov. 1882.

36. Baedeker & Socin 1875, p. 487, PRO FO 226/198 Beirut Draft 113, Eldridge to Embassy 10 Nov. 1878, Lisān 25 Nov. 1878, p. 4, 21 Jun. 1880, p. 4, HCPP C.1993 Jago *Commercial Report Damascus 1877*, Apr. 1878, p. 517.

37. Times 7 Mar. 1873, p. 4; Baedeker & Socin 1875, p. 485; Mackintosh 1883, p. 6-7; el-Hage 2000, p. 133.

A highly uneven distribution of wealth among the townspeople was not uncommon, for according to inheritance inventories from mid-eighteenth century, c. 82% of the population amassed below the average value of estates (1.194 piaster)[38] and accounted for c.17% of the gross value only. As a general rule, the Ottoman fiscal and judicial division between *askeriye* (tax-exempted officials in the broadest sense) and *reaya* (tax-paying subjects) is plainly mirrored in the distribution of wealth, with *reaya* at the lower end of the range.[39] Hence, when the situation instigated popular protest, it was most likely not because of the commoners' relative but absolute poverty.

Before depicting the events that unfolded in March 1878 a few remarks on the importance of bread in the daily diet of Damascenes should be made. Though information on consumption is scarce, a sketch of the general pattern between the 18th and early 20th centuries is possible. The poor majority of townspeople lived mainly on vegetarian provisions, with cereals being their main source of nutrition. In general they preferred white bread made from wheat–a rule from which they diverted only in times of want, when brown and even black bread became the only options. In accordance with European patterns, their demand for bread, which counted for half of the diet under normal conditions (c. ¼ *raṭl*[40] per day), was highly inelastic and would even rise to 90% in times of want.[41]

The cereals consummated by the townspeople were almost exclusively local crops from the Ḥawrān area,[42] which were stored in large open barns in Ṣāliḥiyya and along the main road crossing the Mīdān belonging to local notable and merchant families.[43] These grain wholesale merchants (*bawāyikī*) like the commercial millers (*ṭaḥḥān sūqī*) and bakers (*ḫabbāz sūqī*), were commonly held in bad esteem by the townspeople–not always mistakenly suspected of fraud, hoarding, and adulteration.[44]

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38. Since the introduction of bimetallic standard in 1844, one Ottoman gold *lira* was officially divided into 100 silver piaster (*kuruş*) and 400 copper *para*, the 20 piaster silver *mecidiye* coin being the base of transactions. Due to falling world market prices of silver since 1873 the local value of the piaster diminished from 116 per *lira* in 1875, to 120,5 in 1879, and 125,5 in 1887. This led the Ottoman Empire to devaluate the *mecidiye* for the purpose of tax paying from 20 to 19 piaster in 1880; Handelsarchiv 15 Nov. 1878, p. 489; 27 Aug. 1880, p. 233; Mar. 1887, p. 120-121; Apr. 1888, p. 180; PAMUK 1997, p. 971-973; *CCFC* 2002 [1893], p. 10-1, 55.

39. GREHAN 2007, p. 63-65. For a similar 18th-century distribution see MARINO 1997, p. 137-176. HUDSON 2008's plots on wealth distribution in the last Ottoman decades are unintelligible–except the average of cash holdings (1.976 piaster in the 1880s)–since she confuses ordinal and metrical statistical values, *ibid.*, p. 52-57.

40. Despite attempts to introduce metrical standards in the 1870s and 1880s, the old measures persisted. The basic weight of an *okka* was divided by 400 *dirhem* and roughly equalled 1,282 kg. In Damascus the *raṭl* of two *uqqa* was the common weight. Regarding flour and dough, the *madd* of 6 *ruṭūl/arṭāl* was used; Handelsarchiv 15 Nov. 1878, p. 489; 27 Aug. 1880, p. 233; AL-QĀSIMĪ & AL-ʿAẒM 1960; p. 291; İNALCIK 1985, p. 338-340; *CCFC 2002 [1893]*, p. 5-7, 53.

41. HCPP C.635 Jago *Condition of Industrial Classes in Syria*, 1872, p. 394-395; Levant Herald 22 Dec. 1877, p. 2; GROBBA 1923; THOMPSON 1971, p. 91-92; SCHILCHER 1991, p. 174; GREHAN 2007, p. 66-69

42. Handelsarchiv 22 Nov. 1878, p. 501-502.

43. REILLY 1992, p. 11-3, 14-7; MARINO 1997 (esp. p. 363).

44. Levant Herald 11 Apr. 1878, p. 3; Lisān 31 Oct. 1878, p. 4; 7 Apr. 1879, p. 4; AL-QĀSIMĪ 1960, p. 55-56, 121; AL-QĀSIMĪ & AL-ʿAẒM 1960, p. 290. For a hoarding merchant who committed suicide when prices fell see Bašīr 21 Mar. 1879, p. 3-4.

Whereas it was possible to buy readymade bread from the various bakeries–the Ottoman yearbook recorded 117 for the early 1880s[45]–the majority of Damascenes preferred homemade bread.[46] Those better off bought their annual supplies of wheat immediately after the harvest arrived on the markets in June, causing cyclical price changes.[47] The average price of wheat upon reaching the markets throughout the 1870s was about 20-25 piaster per bushel.[48] In years of abundance, such as 1882 and 1884, prices would fall to 17-20 piaster.[49]

But during the winter of 1877/78 the influx of poor and sick refugees from the battlefields,[50] for whose support the government levied a monthly poll-tax of four piaster upon the male Muslim population,[51] and an exceptionally rough weather that sealed the city off in February 1878,[52] sent prices of cereals skyrocketing. Imperial countermeasures, such as the prohibition of both internal and external cereal exports in grain and flour from various provinces of the Empire, including Syria, proved ineffective.[53] And despite the municipal council's repeated efforts to impose a threshold of 40 piaster per bushel of wheat upon the wholesale merchants, the already high prices doubled between October 1877 and late February 1878, reaching 60 piaster and more.[54] Combined with a minimal daily demand for bread of c. 4,23 Kg per household, this development inflicted daily costs of 9 piaster upon an average family of two adults and four to five children.[55]

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45. Salname Suriye 15 1300 aH [1882/83], p. 245-245.

46. Al-Qāsimī & al-ʿAẓm 1960, p. 291.

47. Mackintosh 1883, p. 162-163, 168.

48. Von Südenhorst 1873, p. 23-26; Handelsarchiv 22 Nov. 1878, p. 501-502. Both include information on the variety of cereals and annual amounts sold in Damascus. See also Ǧinān IX (21), 1 Nov. 1878, p. 682-682, 15 Nov. 1878, 1 Dec. 1878, 15 Dec. 1878. The bushel (*kile*) of 40 litre (new *kile*) or 36,8 litre (old *kile*) was the basic unit of the grain trade. The standard bushel (*Istanbul kilesi*) established a weight of 20 *okka* (c.25,6 kg) but in reality the weight of one bushel of wheat varied between 22 and 26 *okka*. Handelsarchiv 15 Nov. 1878, p. 489; 27 Aug. 1880, p. 233; İnalcik 1985, p. 333, 338-333, 340; *CCFC* 2002 [1893], p. 6-7.

49. HCPP C.3593 Dickson *Commercial Report Damascus 1882*, 1883, p. 536; HCPP C.4446 Dickson *Commercial Report Damascus 1884*, Jul. 1885, p. 961.

50. Estimates vary from "many hundreds" to 1.200 refugees within the city itself and 30.-50.000 Bulgarians and Circassians arriving in the province of Syria throughout the year; FO 78/2850 Damascus political 2, Jago to Earl of Derby 4 Mar. 1878, PA AA R12423 Pera 178, to von Bülow 10 Apr. 1878, Times 13 Apr. 1878, p. 10; Salībā 1971, p. 86-87; Gross 1979, p. 251.

51. Lisān 7 Mar. 1878, p. 4, 30 May 1878, p. 4, FO 78/2850 Damascus political 2, Jago to Earl of Derby 4 Mar. 1878, PA AA R12423 Pera 178, to von Bülow 10 Apr. 1878.

52. Lisān 8 Nov. 1877, p. 4, 28 Jan. 1878, p. 1, 14 Feb. 1878, p. 4, FO 195/1201 Beirut Pol.14, Eldridge to Earl of Derby 28 Feb. 1878; Qassāṭlī 2004 [1879], p. 155.

53. Handelsarchiv 31 Aug. 1877, p. 222, 26 Oct. 1877, p. 427.

54. Lisān 18 Oct. 1877, p. 4, 6 Dec. 1877, p. 4, 10 Dec. 1877, p. 4, 17 Dec. 1877, p. 4, 11 Feb. 1878, p. 4, HCPP C.1993 Jago *Commercial Report Damascus 1877*, Apr. 1878, p. 516.

55. This value should be seen as an order of magnitude of minimal demand rather than a precise measurement. It is based on a minimal personal demand of 0,25 *raṭl* (c.0,64 Kg) per day given by Grehan 2007, p. 68 and an average household size of 6,6 persons in 1907 calculated by Okawara 2003, p. 62-63, which is supported by reports from Thrace in 1877; SAX 1877, p. 126. The daily bread rations allotted to privates in the police forces of 300 *dirham* (c.0,96 Kg) reported by FO 78/2985 Damascus 24, "Report upon the Gendarmerie and Police of Syria by Vice Consul Jago

To fully understand the hardships these developments inflicted upon the population, one has to look into the incomes available to ordinary townspeople. Although the sources do not provide comprehensive information, there is sufficient evidence for an average daily wage for male manual labour of 6-12 piaster in times of economic wellbeing,[56] which decreased to half of that amount between 1876 and 1878.[57] This had particularly harsh implications for many poor women, who could only generate very low incomes on their own. Working mainly at homes–either their own or that of their employers–they engaged in various trades predominantly related to the textile industries and caretaking. On average they earned much less than six piaster per day,[58] if they were indeed paid in cash and if they did not lose their jobs in the economic crises altogether. Many children and apprentices working from dawn till dusk in the textile workshops scattered throughout the city, did so for being fed at their masters' table.[59]

Poor Muslim (*Sunni*) women were most likely the ones whose husbands, sons and brothers were amongst the conscripted troops. Thousands of households were thus deprived of their main source of income.[60] The families of drafted privates were entitled to remunerations of one piaster per day in non-convertible paper money.[61] These notes (*kaime*) fell victim to heavy depreciation, losing up to 70% of their value against the silver piaster at the Galata stock exchange during the final months of the Ottoman-Russian war. Even in

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of Damascus", Jago to Layard 8 Oct. 1879, the 2 lbs. (c. 0,91 Kg) of food rations allotted to privates in the imperial armies, published by Cooke 1968 [1876], p. 50-52, and a report by the British Consul in Beirut that the destitution of Bulgarian prisoners was caused by a mere 2 lbs of bread allotted to them as a daily diet, support this assumption; FO 195/1201 Beirut Pol.14, Eldridge to Earl of Derby 28 Feb. 1878. For the weight of British Pounds see Bigg, Burch, & Oxley 1962, p. 459. Nāṣīf Mišāqa reports in 1894 that "[t]he average standard of living in this district for the mass of the people is from 7 to 20 [US] Cts. a head per day for food." NACP [National Archives, USA, College Park] RG 84 Damascus Vol.105 Damascus "Report on 'Wheat flour'", Mechaka 25 Jan. 1894. On the basis of exchange rates from 1896 this would be 2-5 piaster per head; NACP RG 84 Damascus Vol.105 Damascus 30, Mechaka to Khouri 27 Dec. 1896.

56. HCPP C.635 Jago *Condition of Industrial Classes in Syria*, 1872, p. 394, Handelsarchiv 15 Nov. 1878, p. 493-495, HCPP C.2285 Jago *Commercial Report Damascus 1878*, May 1879, p. 615; al-Qāsimī & al-ʿAẓm 1960, p. 307, 333, 335, 434, 442. See also Ḥannā 1985, p. 47; Vatter 1994, p. 6-7.

57. Von Südenhorst 1873, p. 96; Handelsarchiv 15 Nov. 1878, p. 495.

58. Women washing wool in Damascus earned 1 piaster per day in the 1870s; Von Südenhorst 1873, p. 48, Handelsarchiv 22 Nov. 1878, p. 505. Factory girls in Mt. Lebanon earned 2,5-5 piaster per day in the early 1870s; *ibid.*, p. 67.

59. Mackintosh 1883, p. 46, 64-46, 65; Qudsī 1885 [1882], p. 16; al-Qāsimī 1960, p. 108-9, 155-6; al-Qāsimī & al-ʿAẓm 1960, p. 328-9, 382; Sāmī 1981 [1896], p. 77; some women did work on the streets, such as peddlers, professional mourners, and the compounders of plaster; al-Qāsimī & al-ʿAẓm 1960, p. 260-1, 403, 415. Information on females' wages is scarce; *ibid.*, p. 329, 335, 434, 442, 469, Handelsarchiv 15 Nov. 1878, p. 495, 22 Nov. 1878, p. 505; see also Reilly 1995. On the continuous importance of women and household based production in the textile industries throughout the Eastern Mediterranean see Quataert 1993, p. 86-88; Khater 1996, 2001, p. 19-47; Chalcraft 2005, p. 350-355.

60. Syria BSS [Syria. British Syrian Schools and Bible Mission] Jan. 1878, p. 1-4, FO 226/197 Damascus Political 5, *State of Affairs in Damascus*, Jago to Earl of Derby 27 Mar. 1878, HCPP C.1993 Jago *Commercial Report Damascus 1877*, Apr. 1878, p. 516.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 517. The nominal value approximately equals the official monthly remuneration for a private in the 5th Army Corps of 5 shilling in cash in addition to food rations; Cooke 1968 [1876], p. 51. The penny is computed as 1/240 £ sterling at 131 piaster in Damascus 1876; Handelsarchiv 15 Nov. 1878, p. 489.

the unlikely case that the families actually received the payments,[62] the paper money was not accepted for any transactions in many remote areas of the Empire.[63] Therefore, the demand of nine piaster for their daily bread could not possibly been met by their purchase power.

A local observer at Beirut wrote the following account of the situation:

> "In a country where, in reality, 'bread is the staff of life' to the mass of the population, an augmentation of 100 per cent. in the price of corn is a serious affliction, especially when combined with a lack of employment and a general reduction of wages. Many projects have been adopted by the local authorities, ostensibly with the object of regulating the price of cereals but nearly all these measures have been of doubtful wisdom, more adapted to benefit wealthy speculators than the suffering poor."[64]

The destitution is further illustrated by Augusta Mentor Mott of the British Syrian Schools, who reported home that "Ten pounds [of flour distributed to them by the mission] will supply 250 families with flour for a day".[65] Finally the homes of the poor, often made from stamped earth and shared between a number of families each inhabiting a single room around a common courtyard,[66] were more vulnerable to the cold and the heavy rains, adding further destitution to the starving families.

In this situation, groups of women, chiefly the families of absent troops,[67] took to the streets in mid-March 1878, only days before newspapers in Beirut printed reports on the signing of the peace treaty of San Stefano between Russia and the Ottoman Empire that had been negotiated in early March.[68] According to newspaper articles, starving women marched to the Marǧa square, the centre of Ottoman authority and location of the central prison and various barracks, the military schools, the post and telegraph offices, seat of the central command of the 5th Army Corps, the site of coffeehouses and the only hotel.[69] There they "invade[d] the precincts of the Serail daily crying before the wi[n]dows of the

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62. In 1877/78 the government commonly withheld the wages of officials. In the wake of holidays, such as the *bayram*, quarterly payments with a 50 % war tax reduction were made. Since this practice meant a flooding of the market with huge amounts of paper money, it caused further cyclical depreciations; Levant Herald 8 Oct. 1877, p. 2, Levant Herald 10 Dec. 1877, p. 2. Wages of military and civil personnel in Damascus were not paid at least between Mai 1879 and June 1880; FO 78/3130 Damascus 4, Jago to Layard 10 Feb. 1880, Lisān 7 Jun. 1880, p. 4, 17 Jun. 1880, p. 4.

63. On the introduction of the paper money, the problems causing its depreciation, and the situation in the provinces see Levant Herald 5 Jan. 1877, 11 Jan. 1877, 18 Jan. 1877, 23 Jan. 1877, 25 Jan. 1877, 13 Feb. 1877, 13 Feb. 1877, 20 Feb. 1877, 26 Apr. 1877; Pamuk 1997, p. 971-973.

64. Levant Herald 22 Dec. 1877, p. 2.

65. Syria BSS Apr. 1878, p. 1.

66. HCPP C.635 Jago Condition of Industrial Classes in Syria, 1872, p. 3894-3895; Mackintosh 1883, p. 13; Marino 1997, p. 253-256; see also Arnaud 2001, p. 204.

67. Ṯamarāt [al-Funūn] 21 Mar. 1878, p. 4, FO 226/197 Damascus Political 5, *State of Affairs in Damascus*, Jago to Earl of Derby 27 Mar. 1878.

68. Levant Herald 5 Mar. 1878, p. 2, Bašīr 22 Mar. 1878, p. 3.

69. For the development of this particularly Ottoman area see weber 1998.

vali, 'Give us bread; give us bread!'[70]" In addition, they presented a loaf of black and badly smelling bread to the governor.[71]

Another observer, the British Vice-Consul Thomas Jago, further underlined the violent character of the protests:

> "This general feeling of discontent & disaffection against everything Ottoman - proceeding out of recent events, showed itself forcibly on the 16.th instant & following days when owing to a rise in the already high price of bread, a mob of women, chiefly the families of departed Radifs, stormed the Seraïl of Damascus, the official residence of Djevdet Pasha, the newly appointed Gov.r Gen. of Syria.
>
> Bitter curses upon the Sultan & his Gov.t for the evils which have lately fallen upon the land were liberally showered upon the Pasha, as well as allusions to the corruption of the administration in general and of Governors General in particular. Reproaches for the losses of their male relatives were interspersed with hopes from the more desperate that the Russians would take Syria & thus relieve them from the curse upon them."[72]

Such grave a step was certainly facilitated by the fact that a new governor, Cevdet Paşa (March-December 1878), arrived only two weeks before and could not draw on reliable alliances within the city. Furthermore there was no one left for the protection of the palace. Most of the troops were absent on the battle fields - of the 28 battalions of the 5th Army Corps only one remained garrisoned in Damascus[73] - and the badly, if at all, paid police force was equally hard hit by the bread prices.[74]

Not much is known about the governor's reaction and nothing about the fate of the protestors.[75] But *Ṯamarāt al-Funūn* and *The Levant Herald*, printed articles in which the protests were displayed as being chiefly directed against hoarding and fraud amongst the grain merchants, which was then successfully battled by the governor and the authorities:

> "In this situation he [the governor] issued strict orders to the head of the municipality and to Hasan Ağa Būẓū [binbaşı of the police (*zabtiye*) and its deputy commander]. [...] with the help of Saʿīd Paşa and Osman Bey some houses of wheat hoarders (*buyūt muḥtakirī al-qamḥ*) were inspected. They extracted an ample amount of wheat that [then] was

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70. Levant Herald 28 Mar. 1878, p. 2.

71. Ṯamarāt 21 Mar. 1878, p. 4.

72. FO 226/197 Damascus Political 5, *State of Affairs in Damascus*, Jago to Earl of Derby 27 Mar. 1878.

73. *Ibid.*, Cooke 1968 [1876], p. 14, 31, 57-14, 31, 58.

74. FO 78/2850 Damascus 5, Jago to Earl of Derby 4 Mar. 1878, Lisān 7 Mar. 1878, p. 4; the police forces of the Gendarmerie and *zabtiye* were allotted a weekly payment of 20-50 piaster, Lisān 2 Dec. 1878, p. 4, FO 78/2985 Damascus 24, "Report upon the Gendarmerie and Police of Syria by Vice Consul Jago of Damascus", Jago to Layard 8 Oct. 1879.

75. Gross 1979, p. 249-250 recounts with the errant reference to FO 78/2850 Damascus 10, Jago to Layard 28 Apr. 1878 and a French archival source that Cevdet Paşa had to call in troops to disperse the angry women and that he undertook decisive and successful steps to lower the bread prices.

brought to the serai. In addition, a number of bakers were paraded around on the streets in shackles."[76]

"Le *Hadika-ul-Akhbar*, journal official publié à Beyrouth, dit qu'une réunion d'indigents et de pauvres s'est tenue la semaine dernière devant le sérail du gouvernement à Damas, en faisant entendre des murmures et des plaintes contre la rareté du pain, la mauvaise qualité de celui livré à la consommation, jointe à l'excessive élévation du prix, et cela vu l'absence des céréales que des entrepreneurs avaient emmagasinées et qu'ils refusaient de livrer au marché. Le *vali*, Djevdet pacha, se rendit immédiatement au Conseil administratif et concerta les mesures nécessaires pour faire cesser cet état de choses. Les magasins du Méidan remplis de blé ont été ouverts au marché et les boulangers ont pu ainsi se fournir du blé qui leur était nécessaire et livrer à la consommation une bonne qualité de blé, à un prix relativement fort réduit."[77]

Yet, neither *Lisān al-Ḥāl*, Beirut's leading private newspaper, nor *al-Bašīr* printed any article on these protests and the asserted improvement in grain prices. Instead, one can find reports on further soaring prices, reaching 70 piaster per bushel of wheat in mid-April before the new and abundant harvests brought relief in May and June.[78]

The bread riot of March 1878 shows that poor women did have the means and the will to address their grievances in a public place, and considered the public realm the appropriate place to voice their claims. While their raised demands did not explicitly aim at gendering particular sites as public places, by physically occupying the Ottoman representative place *par excellence,* Muslim women appropriated a place for their own use that was shaped by the command and the expressed spatial policies of the ruling and marched to a site outside the traditional centre of staged discontent, the vicinity of the central Friday Mosque and the surrounding Suqs. Furthermore, the outbreak of physical violence was not prevented or mediated by other factions in the city, and particularly the notables, for whom it might have served as an additional lever against the imperial authorities.

The Burial of Miḫāʾīl al-Ṣabbāġ

Only a few months later competing claims to *public places* and *public space* were explicitly voiced and performed in the clashes and the media discourse surrounding the burial of Miḫāʾīl al-Ṣabbāġ, a Greek Catholic dignitary (*min wuǧūh*), who passed away on the evening of Saturday 6 July 1878, aged forty.[79]

The funeral service and procession took place the next day, Sunday 7 July. Most likely the service was held at the Greek Catholic Patriarchate in the south-eastern corner of

76. Ṯamarāt 21 Mar. 1878, p. 4.

77. Levant Herald 11 Apr. 1878, p. 3.

78. Lisān 13 May 1878, p. 4, 16 May 1878, p. 1, Bašīr 24 Apr. 1878, p. 4; the price fell to 25-6 piaster per bushel in late June, Lisān 1 Jul. 1878, p. 3.

79. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4, Bašīr 12 Jul. 1878, p. 4.

the city *intra muros*. It was attended by Monseigneur Melatios, the Bishop of Zahle, the clergy of the Catholic communities, and a large crowd of commoners and nobles (*al-ʿāmm wa-l-ḫāṣṣ*).[80] Somehow the idea arose to bury the deceased on the graveyard of St. George (*Ǧāwurǧiyūs, Ǧirǧis*) *extra muros* in the southern quarter of Mīdān.[81] In their original reports both Catholic and Orthodox commentators agree that the site was commonly known to belong to the Orthodox community,[82] despite some Catholic families owning about two or three sepulchres there.[83] Accordingly, the plan to bury Miḫāʾīl al-Ṣabbāġ at this cemetery lead to differences among the attendees of the funeral, with the deceased's brother, Ḥabīb, and other relatives objecting to the idea and trying to divert the procession's course to the Catholic cemetery.[84] However, the procession proceeded to the Mīdān.

Apparently, the Greek Orthodox community received news about the on-going procession, and some Orthodox youths, having the conviction that no Catholic should be allowed to be buried there, confronted the funeral procession upon its arrival at the cemetery.[85] A battle ensued that was allegedly won by the Catholics and left some (five) Orthodox wounded.[86] The authorities, upon receiving the news, intervened by dispatching the commander of the police (*zabtiye*), a *binbaşı*, and some hundred police and regular troops (*nizam*) to prevent further violence. They also ordered an official investigation and despatched a surgeon, for dressing the injuries and recording the reports of the wounded.[87]

At this point of the narrative our sources begin to disagree and accuse each other of mending the truth. *Lisān al-Ḥāl*'s correspondent, Ǧibrān Louis, a Greek Orthodox lawyer and member of the historical society, who regularly delivered speeches at graduations and theatrical performances of the Greek Orthodox schools,[88] reports in his first letter of 8 July that the Greek Orthodox youths were infuriated by the Catholics unearthing the remains of two persons, a father and his son, belonging to the Orthodox community. He further notes that the Orthodox Patriarchate tried to hold back the youths by sending its Cavass. But in vain; the youths called for a written note, which was sent through a messenger but only reached the cemetery after the arrival of the Catholic procession when the scuffle

80. Bašīr 12 Jul. 1878, p. 4; Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4 provides a shorter list of attendees stating that many of "the people" (*al-qawm*) followed the coffin.

81. *Ibid.*, Bašīr 19 Jul. 1878, p. 4. The location of the graveyard seems to be disputable, as a graveyard of St. George is located just outside Bāb al-Kīsān to the South East (cf. Baedeker & Socin 1875, p. 499), which is noted by other sources as belonging to the Greek Orthodox Community (FO 195/1765 Damascus 7, Mechaka to Fane 26 Feb. 1892). However, it is highly unlikely that a variety of local authors could have confused the location of the dispute site.

82. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4, Bašīr 19 Jul. 1878, p. 4.

83. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4, Bašīr 19 Jul. 1878, p. 4; Lisān 22 Jul. 1878, p. 4, 1 Aug. 1878, p. 4, Bašīr 9 Aug. 1878, p. 3-4

84. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4; the location of this cemetery is not provided.

85. *Ibid.*, Bašīr 19 Jul. 1878, p. 4; Lisān 22 Jul. 1878, p. 4, Bašīr 9 Aug. 1878, p. 3-4.

86. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4, Bašīr 19 Jul. 1878, p. 4.

87. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4.

88. Lisān 15 Aug. 1878, p. 4, 24 Oct. 1878, p. 4, 4 Sep. 1879, p. 3, 25 Sep. 1879, p. 3.

was already in full swing.[89] In his first report for *al-Bašīr*, the Jesuit father Miḫāʾīl Fākiyānī, on the other hand, claims that the Orthodox Patriarchate, having heard of the funeral procession, sent its secretary to convey a permit for burying Miḫāʾīl al-Ṣabbāġ on the cemetery of St. George.[90]

Both of these accounts are heavily opposed in a later exchange of letters. An anonymous defender of the Catholics, whose letter, dated 17 July, was published by *Lisān al-Ḥāl*, argues that the exhumation was a lie fabricated only days after the incident to provide an excuse for the Orthodox ravagers.[91] The same is asserted by *al-Bašīr's* final and anonymous report on the issue, which, on the other hand, also denies that the Orthodox Patriarch gave his permission for the burial.[92] Surprisingly none of the newspapers relate what happened to the funeral procession after the battle.

Despite the Catholics reported victory at the graveyard, some 150 of their coreligionists from the Mīdān left their neighbourhood the next day after sunset [past 7:15 pm] and tried to attack the quarter of Bāb Tūmā in retaliation. Coming from the south they entered through Bāb Šarqī and clashed with Orthodox youths, but were ultimately fought back by soldiers and policemen from the barracks (*qišle*) at the crossing of Bāb Tūmā Road and Straight Street.[93] In the cause of this fight three Orthodox were arrested for disobeying the troops.[94] About a third of the Catholic attackers then further rounded the city and entered through the Bāb Tūmā gate, verbally and physically assaulting any Orthodox they could find.[95] Again police and regular troops had to be employed to disperse the crowd.[96] Later that evening, troops raided the Catholic quarter of the Mīdān on charges of instigating civil and religious strife. As a result, some 8 Catholics were arrested that night.[97]

Again parts of the narrative are hotly debated in the newspapers. In a very polemic style, Ǧibrān Louis repeatedly accuses Yūḥannā Ġanāǧa (d. 1881),[98] a prominent member of the Greek Catholic community in Bāb Tūmā, who was to be elected to the municipal council in 1879,[99] of instigating the attack, claiming the accounts of wounded eye-witnesses and a very bad reputation among "the dignitaries, the notables, and the *ʿulamāʾ* [... for] notoriously stirring up the people"[100] as his sources. Louis writes that after entering through Bāb Tūmā

89. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4.

90. Bašīr 19 Jul. 1878, p. 4.

91. Lisān 22 Jul. 1878, p. 4, yet the exhumation was already reported immediately after the events in Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4.

92. Bašīr 9 Aug. 1878, p. 3-4.

93. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4, 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4; Bašīr 19 Jul. 1878, p. 4; Lisān 25 Jul. 1878, p. 3-4.

94. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4; Bašīr 19 Jul. 1878, p. 4; Lisān 22 Jul. 1878, p. 4.

95. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4.

96. *Ibid.*.

97. *Ibid.*, Bašīr 19 Jul. 1878, p. 4; Lisān 25 Jul. 1878, p. 3-4.

98. Lisān 3 Nov. 1881, p. 3.

99. FO 78/2985 Damascus 27, Jago to Layard 6 Jun. 1879; Lisān 19 Jun. 1879, p. 4, Ṯamarāt 23 Jun. 1879, p. 1.

100. Lisān 25 Jul. 1878, p. 3-4.

gate, "the armed and rebellious crowd of Catholics from the Mīdān came to the house of Ḥannā Efendi Ġanāǧa, who incited the people (*al-qawm*) yesterday and inflamed them. He inebriated the people of the Mīdān with the spirit of anger (*sakkara ahl al-mīdān bi-ḫamrat al-ḥanaq*)."[101] This was immediately refuted by the already mentioned anonymous advocate of the Catholics in *Lisān al-Ḥāl* and Salīm ʿAnḥūrī in *al-Ǧanna*, both claiming that only a very small crowd of up to 20 people came to the house of Yūḥannā Ġanāǧa, who, in addition to being widely known as an amicable and peaceful man, was out attending to a friend of his who had fallen ill.[102]

According to matching reports, the issue was solved on the initiative of the authorities through negotiations between notables from all the communities involved. Yet they differ in the details of this mediation. The original report by Ǧibrān Louis of 8 July relates that after the surgeon had made his report, a congregation of Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic nobles (*ḏawāt*) met under the auspices of the commander of the police forces in the *qishle* of Bāb Tūmā and decided to arrest some of the troublemakers from both parties to pacify the communities.[103] In later reports, Louis labelled them wise or sane men (*ʿuqalāʾ*)[104] from all sects (*maḏhab*).[105] The anonymous author of the letter to *al-Bašīr* claimed that, as the issue was raised and investigated by the authorities, the notables (*aʿyān*) of both communities met separately at the respective Patriarchates.[106] This version is then somehow augmented by the final report of *al-Bašīr*, stating that the investigation was concluded by a report, agreed upon by the heads and some of the notables (*aʿyān*) from the two communities at a meeting with the Muslim notables, which was convoked by the Vali, Cevdet Paşa.[107] Finally, *Ṯamarāt al-Funūn* reports by mid-August that an imperial telegram was received to the end that both communities have the right to use the graveyard of St. George.[108]

So far then this episode is about property and the appropriation of public space. The actors range from the unnamed youths and the police forces, who physically fought over the rights to use and dominate certain locations in the city, to the notables and representatives of the authorities who negotiated the claims. Finally, at least eight, mostly Christian, authors hotly contested each others' reports on the events in the Beiruti newspapers *Lisān al-Ḥāl, al-Bašīr, al-Ǧanna,* and *Ṯamārāt al-Funūn*, trying to establish an authoritative truth. In comparison to the bread riot earlier that year, one is struck by the power of the local and imperial authorities to pacify the two parties and the town. Only four months after the cessation of hostilities in the Ottoman-Russian war, enough troops were deployable

101. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4, see also Lisān 25 Jul. 1878, p. 3-4.

102. Lisān 22 Jul. 1878, p. 4; Ǧanna 19 Jul. 1878 is mentioned in Lisān 25 Jul. 1878, p. 3-4.

103. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4.

104. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4, 25 Jul. 1878, p. 3-4, 1 Aug. 1878, p. 4.

105. Lisān 11 Jul. 1878, p. 4.

106. Bašīr 19 Jul. 1878, p. 4.

107. Bašīr 9 Aug. 1878, p. 3-4.

108. Ṯamarāt 15 Aug. 1878, p. 3.

to physically dominate the peripheral locations of the scuffles far away from the Ottoman area of the town. And even tough local elites brokered an agreement, the authorities and, in one report, the *Vali* himself are lauded for convoking these meetings. Ultimately, the solution is sanctioned by the imperial centre and thus, at least in the media discourse, the authorities ruled both public places and the public space.

Annual Exams and Revolutionary Placards

The contestation of public space through the application of spatial practices becomes apparent in two arguably interlinked phenomena in close temporal proximity of Miḫā'īl al-Ṣabbāġ's funeral: The annual graduation ceremonies at Christian and government schools and the posting of revolutionary placards. Both made use of common patterns of social practices and very particular places. As a tool of addressing the literate passer-by, and probably attracting crowds of people clustering around and listening to someone reading them out loudly, posted leaflets and placards were one of the most important and increasingly common means of mass communication in the late 19th century. As they required some technical skills and access to tools and raw materials, their use was mainly limited to the authorities and local elites.[109] Yet, their commonality may have provided the cover for posting deviant opinions to be discovered as such only upon reading. At least during the 1880s anonymous placards criticising and calling for action against both the authorities and specific parts of the population occur numerous times.[110]

Anonymous placards, accusing the governor and "other Turkish officials" of maladministration and corruption, were posted on Friday 26 July 1878 in the Suqs and religious sites surrounding the Umayyad Mosque as well as inside the Mosque itself. Others appeared near the Serai on the Marǧa.[111] Being heavily crowded with people on their way to the Friday prayer, as well as merchants, peddlers, beggars, and thieves, all trying to increase their business,[112] the placards went anything but unnoticed and aroused rumours amongst the population for the following days.[113]

An Ottoman version was posted on the walls of the Serai and across the city. Its author addressed Cevdet Paşa directly, claiming that he was received with the highest

109. E.g. communicating war-news, legal and moral prescriptions, and electoral rolls FO 195/1113 Damascus 17, Dickson to Elliot 5 Aug. 1876; Ḥadīqat [al-Aḫbār] 11 Jan. 1883, p. 1f; Lisān 25 Jun. 1883, p. 4; MECA GB165-0086, Dickson, *Journal 1886-1888*, Damascus, entry of 24 May 1887; Lisān 21 Apr. 1890, p. 3; Bašīr 28 Oct. 1891, p. 2-3; Lisān 18 Feb. 1892, p. 2-3; Lisān 12 Feb. 1894, p. 4; Suriye 23 Feb. 1900, p. 1.

110. Eg. calling for violence against the Jewish quarter (FO 195/1153 Damascus 11, Jago to Jocelyn 14 Apr. 1877), criticising imperial officials (Ṯamarāt 8 Oct. 1883, p. 1, Lisān 11 Oct. 1883, p. 1, FO 195/1448 Damascus 26, Block to Wyndham 13 Oct. 1883, Lisān 15 Oct. 1883, p. 1; Ṯamarāt 22 Oct. 1883, p. 1; Lisān 4 Nov. 1883, p. 1; MECA GB165-0086; Dickson, *Journal 1886-1888*, Damascus, entry of 4 May 1887), and in the conflict between Greek Orthodox factions over Patriarch Spiridon (FO 195/1765 Damascus 7, Mechaka to Fane 26 Feb. 1892).

111. FO 226/197 Damascus, Mechaka 26 Jul. 1878.

112. Lisān 21 Jun. 1880, p. 4; Mackintosh 1883, p. 66.

113. FO 226/197 Damascus, Mechaka 26 Jul. 1878, FO 226/197 Damascus, Mechaka 29 Jul. 1878.

expectations as to his honesty and uprightness, when he arrived as the new governor of the province on 1 March 1878.[114] Yet, soon the peoples' expectations were betrayed and the placard accuses Cevdet Paşa of having abandoned the respect for the Muslim faith and adopted the morals of Franks and infidels. His conduct in office is displayed as delegitimising Ottoman rule not just in the Balkans. The fragment ends with the threat that "We are ready to display in the streets of the city all your business and expose them verbatim to the Sublime Porte."[115]

The other placard, written in "revolutionary" Arabic, and posted in the vicinity of the Umayyad Mosque addressed the people, epitomised as "Syria", to overcome all discord in the fight for a just society and good governance from among themselves. Christians and Muslims should stand together in righteousness, diligence, and perseverance against corrupted officials. Personal interest should be put aside in the struggle against unjust and foreign rulers, who are explicitly accused of having woefully appropriated the rightful owners' soil, dignity, and culture.[116]

The placards were mainly distributed in the area between the Ottoman space of the Marǧa area and the Christian space of Bāb Tūmā. Appealing to the Muslim and local Arabic-speaking population by blaming all the shortcomings of the authorities on them being either infidels or foreign "Turks" they claimed the city as a public space that should belong to its indigenous inhabitants. Yet, quite interestingly, the language and wording of the placards did not match their locations. The placard in Ottoman Turkish, posted in the Ottoman area, accused the rulers of apostasy, whereas the Arabic one, being posted in the Umayyad Mosque, called for the unity of all faiths vis-à-vis the foreign rulers.

In clear contrast to the placards, which, in this particular instance, the newspapers of Beirut did not report on,[117] one finds vivid descriptions of social unity and cohesion on the occasion of the annual round of exams at both government and Christian schools. The first account precedes the placards by two months, two others, however, date to the days and weeks immediately following this display of discord.

> "On Sunday, the 18th of this May, the exams of the military schools, the *idâdîye* and the *rüşdiye*, took place. They were attended by the illustrious statesman Cevdet Paşa, governor of the province, and the joyous gentleman Nazif Paşa, head of staff of the special *sultaniye* troops and representative of General Hasan Edip Paşa, head of staff of the military war [personnel], dignitaries from the military police, and some of the *ʿulamāʾ* of the city as

114. Compare FO 78/2850 Damascus 5, Jago to Earl of Derby 4 Mar. 1878; Ṯamarāt 7 Mar. 1878, p. 4; Lisān 7 Mar. 1878, p. 4.

115. Attached in a French translation only to FO 226/197, *State of Affairs in Damascus*, 1878.

116. *Ibid.*

117. On other occasions oppositional placards were mentioned; e.g. in Oct 1883, see Ṯamarāt 8 Oct. 1883, p. 1; Lisān 11 Oct. 1883, p. 1, 15 Oct. 1883, p. 1; Ṯamarāt 22 Oct. 1883, p. 1.

well as the instructors, representatives and teachers of the Orthodox and the Catholic schools[...]."[118]

"On Sunday July 30th, the exams of the Orthodox schools took place. The school was honoured by the attendance of the patriarch of the community, His Excellency Ḥasan Edip Paşa, head of war staff of the 5th army corps [...], many of the military officers and government officials, the directors of the *harbiye* and the military *rüşdiye* as well as their teachers, many of the city's dignitaries (*wuǧūh*), and the heads of the Orthodox community[...]."[119]

"On August 7th, commenced the exams of the School of the Catholic Patriarchate. The school was honoured with the presence of the illustrious Ḥasan Edip Paşa accompanied by a number of military gendarmes, the deputy of His Beatitude the Coptic Exarch, Monseigneur Paulos, and many of the nobles (*ḏawāt*) and the notables (*aʿyān*) of the [religious] communities. The students were examined in the Arabic, Turkish, French, and Greek languages, calculation, and geography. And the excellencies were delighted with what they saw [...]."[120]

The striking uniformity of these descriptions for both government and Christian community schools provides a model for society.[121] They produced a social space that, despite equally emphasizing cohesion and unity, stands in direct opposition to the one transported through the placards. On all three occasions imperial officials, both military and civil in full uniform, local Muslim notables, and religious dignitaries from all major communities gathered with the teachers, the students and their families, and a crowd of spectators. Ottoman flags were flying and pennants hailed the Sultan and the governor. Students and teachers delivered speeches in Arabic, Turkish, and Greek praising the nation (*umma*) and the *mission civilisatrice* of providing education to the homeland's sons (*abnā' al-waṭan*). The festivities closed with performances of gymnastics, pantomime, or poetry and finally prizes and scholarships were awarded.[122]

Again, very particular places and spatial practices were chosen for the display of this model. It brought persons into areas, which they did not visit on a daily basis. And it did so with a high level of visibility. Whereas the display of imperial symbols was most probably common in the Ottoman places around the Marǧa (the location of the military

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118. Lisān 24 Jun. 1878, p. 4.

119. Lisān 15 Aug. 1878, p. 4.

120. Lisān 22 Aug. 1878, p. 4.

121. According to Clifford Geertz ceremonies consist of two simultaneous modes of modelling society, providing both a "model for" and a "model of" society through symbols carried during the ceremony, and the ceremony being symbolic itself, thus combining the Durkheimian notion of ceremony being merely a representation of society and the Gramscian idea that hegemonic strata employ ceremonies to reify their values and norms. James Gelvin argues in the context of Damascus during the time of Faysal's short-lived Arab Government, that the pure "model for" form lost its appeal and thus failed, whereas the reason for the popular committees' success was that they provided through the communication of a bottom-up movement the "model of" society; see Gelvin 1994, especially p. 29-31.

122. Similar descriptions can be found for almost every year between 1878 and 1909.

schools), it was an exceptional event to see a large body of high ranking officials in full uniform and accompanied by a body guard crossing the city into the Christian places of Bāb Tūmā. By attending the Christian schools' graduations, and by co-opting the Christian dignitaries and teachers to participate in the ceremonies at the government schools, the authorities aimed at incorporating a part of the population that was perceived as being especially vulnerable to foreign influence; and they did so with a high level of visibility. The celebrations signalled to foreign powers, to local non-Christian populations, and to the local Christians that the latter were considered integral to the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore both rivalling Christian communities were subjected to the same policies that gendered an area far away from the Ottoman centre around the Marǧa as being part of the state. In contrast to the events surrounding the burial, this time the Ottoman state did not appropriate the area through the application of physical force, but through integrating it into its model of social space.

The street, negotiations of public space, and a late Ottoman urban society

So far then, these episodes re-present three different forms of spatial contestations within a very narrow timeframe of spring and summer 1878. This focus is informed by an emphasis on the plurality of historical realities at any given time and the need to avoid insinuating progressing development through chronologic presentation, where I cannot substantiate such a progression. The synchronous "production of space" ranged from urban actors, who aimed at gendering the public space of the city, such as the authors of the newspaper reports, the authors of oppositional placards, or the authorities staging a particular ritual, to groups of youths, who fought over the use and the limits of very particular public places, as in the case of the graveyard of St. George, to other contentious groups, who appropriated certain locations in their struggle for subsistence. As far as we can discern from the sources at hand, the events depicted are singular in their temporal conjuncture. As historical realities every one of them offers and demonstrates alternative possibilities and agency challenging established "knowledge" and political arguments about historical urban societies of the Middle East or of predominantly Muslim provenance. Yet, despite their exceptional character, they have implications that go beyond the immediate particularities of however interesting an anecdote, as similarly structured negotiations over public places and public space can be found with varying degrees of frequency throughout the entire period of Abdülhamit II's reign.[123]

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123. E.g. a female contentious gathering at the Marǧa in February 1897 (Ramaḍān) in demand of arrears in in pay for their husbands and protesting the eminent calling-out of redifs during a period of high prices; inter-communal tensions were solved by the notables under the auspices and with the weapons of the authorities in July 1883 (Christian-Muslim clashes during Ramaḍān), February 1888 (attacks on a Greek Catholic funeral), or April 1890 (blood libel during Easter/Passover); oppositional placards were posted in August 1880 (shortly before the beginning of the Ramaḍān), September/October 1883, or in May 1887 just days before the Sultan's birthday; finally, affirmative rituals such as the graduation ceremonies were staged every single year.

Issues of urban life and urban governance in cities of the Eastern Mediterranean are often overshadowed by a number of comparative concepts, most prominently the "Islamic City"[124] and its derivatives, all marked by paradigmatic generalisations and assumptions.[125] A comparative stance is taken to the extreme by juxtaposing the Weberian concept of a Western city as based on a public sphere of the burghers with an Islamic City as a conglomerate of segregated private spheres,[126] ultimately denying non-Western settlements the status of city at all.[127]

Even the outspoken and influential critique of this model remained within an analytical framework of legal and normative terminology set out by the paradigm.[128] A dichotomy of private and public, firmly enshrined in the modern societies' emphasis on property rights, sustained as the conceptual framework of analysis and was only slightly modified by introducing the notion of the semi-private or communal character of one's neighbourhood and its *cul-de-sacs*.[129]

Admittedly, two main aspects of the "Islamic City" paradigm can be found in the urban society of Damascus: the topographic characteristics of inward-looking houses combined with hierarchical ways of access[130] and the judicial and cultural norms of (visual) privacy and segregation.[131] But apparently these *conceived* and *perceived spaces* cannot fully account for the spatial practices depicted above.

By focusing on the question of family and household sizes and posing the question whether a single family can be translated into a single and enclosed residential unit, social historians showed that visual privacy and strict ethno-religious segregation was not to be found in the historical everyday life of the poor majority of urban dwellers. Many poor families shared a common courtyard; many poor women had to work for their income even when they were married and their husbands were not drafted into the army; and many

124. For a historiography of this paradigm see Haneda 1994 & Miura 1994. The "Islamic City" is constituted by a central congregational Mosque for Friday prayers, public baths for the ablutions, a *Qāḍī* presiding a court that enforces *šarīʿa* regulations and a central market area, which can be accessed via the few thoroughfares and without entering the residential areas of inward-looking courtyard houses; Wirth 1991, p. 56-57; interestingly French colonial urban planners began building the first "Islamic City" in Casablanca in 1917 and designated "Old Cities" with restored palaces and crowded popular quarters in opposition to "New Cities" all throughout their colonial possessions in North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean before the scholarly paradigm was first developed by Marçais 1928; Thompson 2000, p. 177-178; Cohen & Eleb 2002, p. 215-226.

125. E.g. the "Oriental City", Ismail 1972, p. 116; Wirth 2000, and the "Historic Middle Eastern City"; Denoeux 1993, p. 29.

126. E.g. Wirth 1991 (esp.52); Hakim 1986; Sack 1989, p. 53, 62.

127. Weber 1980, p. 736; for discussions referring to Weber see Hourani 1970, p. 13-15; Eickelman 1974, p. 174.

128. Eickelman 1974; Abu-Lughod 1987; Haneda 1994.

129. Abu-Lughod 1987, p. 168, compare also Zandi-Sayek 2000, p. 61-62.

130. Sack 1989, p. 44, 53, 62, Wirth 1991, p. 56-57.

131. Mackintosh 1883, p. 25, Qassāṭlī 2004 [1879], p. 218; Spies 1927; Brunschvig 1947; Hakim 1986; Abu-Lughod 1987, p. 167; al-Kodmany 1999; Reilly 1996, p. 213.

poor men could not afford to marry and thus lived outside common family boundaries.[132] In addition, as we have seen, the townspeople used public places and streets not only for conducting their business, but raised political claims and performed communal and social identities. Degrees of accessibility of public places and the visibility of communal affiliation varied. Despite other reports on heavily restricted movement at night, caused by gated neighbourhoods and the absence of streetlights,[133] the Catholic youths from the Mīdān reportedly attacked during the earlier hours of the night. We do not know how the attackers (easily) identified their victims as being Orthodox.[134] Thus, the applicability of the established terminology of dominant private places and an absent public space must be challenged.

The colonial nature of an a priori gendering of social space along the binary dichotomy of public and private, commonly associated with an equally binary dichotomy of male and female spaces and places, its historical dependence on the development of a modern state and top-down approaches of nation-building, and thus, its deficiency for the analysis and historiography of societies not (yet) engaged in dominant national discourses has become a major token in the social sciences and humanities.[135] As Elizabeth Thompson has shown, violent negotiations of private/public boundaries and gender roles, including acid attacks on women and the torching of cinemas populated with female audiences, took centre stage in the nationalist discourse and anti-colonial struggle of the 1920s and 1930s in Damascus.[136] However, a critical evaluation of the epistemological categories permeates only slowly into the social historiography of Damascus in late Ottoman times and is absent from most recent publications.[137]

In focusing at spatial practices instead of legal norms and discourses, I suggest situating the incidents of 1878 in a transitional period from an old regime to the new paradigms of nation and modernity, since the spatial characteristics of both can be observed.

The pre-national Ottoman ancien régime was characterised by a constantly negotiated equilibrium between two power bases united in their goal to extract maximum surplus from the vast majority of subaltern classes. The division of labour between a ruling imperial centre and the governing local elites was constituted through and embedded in a multiplicity of vertical–and often institutionalised networks of the bureaucracy and

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132. Marcus 1986, 1989; Ghazzal 1993, p. 33-34; Marino 1997; Doumani 1998; al-Qattan 2002; Okawara 2003, 2005; Vatter 2006, p. 86; Gottreich 2007.

133. Mackintosh 1883, p. 16, 77; al-Qāsimī 1960, p. 58, 88-9; Von Kremer 1854, p. 17-8; Wedewer 2004 [1887], p. 232.

134. Differences in dress and local clustering should be considered as generally known to the contemporaries. Yet, none of the written or pictorial sources consulted so far differentiates between the two Christian parties involved.

135. Tucker 1983; Singerman 1995; Khater 1996; Singerman & Hoodfar 1996; Göle 1997; Joseph 1997; Eickelman & Salvatore 2002; Thompson 2003; Mills 2007; Mundy & Smith 2007.

136. Thompson 2000, p. 182-185.

137. E.g. Hudson 2008; for examples of still lingering claims of the model in regard to Muslim societies see Ammann 2004, p. 92; for two brilliant studies on neighbouring cities see Hanssen 2005 and Watenpaugh 2006.

households –as well as horizontal networks on all levels.[138] The public spaces of the old regime, understood as both vertical and horizontal social allegiances, were multiple, fluid, and overlapping. They were manifest in gathering places of various social groups, transgressing mere kinship relations and constituted through informal as well as formal bonds: professional corporations, sufi orders, neighbourhood committees, etc.[139]

In the late 19th century, one could thus find various public places all throughout the city: the Ottoman places in the west and around the nuclei of government institutions and the official rituals performed in the Mīdān, the Marǧa, and Bāb Tūmā; the buildings, institutions, and ceremonies of the religious communities, with the Muslim majority clustered around the Umayyad Mosque and the north-eastern parts of town, the local Christian and foreign Mission churches and schools centred in the east, and the Jewish quarter south of the Straight Street; and the streets, Suqs, Mosques, coffeehouses, public baths, workshops, stalls, and open places scattered throughout the city that were sites of the townspeople's everyday-life.

In contrast, the modern (nation) state emerged from and aimed at creating and monopolising a homogenised public sphere in its pursuit to mould an imagined community of loyal compatriots.[140] As Walter Meeker put it, "[...] a people did not create their own state so often as a state created its own people."[141] Official "investment in public space", as developed in the 19th century, was part of this larger development of modern and nation states, which turned from ruling to governing their subjects and later citizens.[142] Official policies aimed at engaging every subjects' everyday-life practices with the state: targeting individuals who never before had been pursued with services rather than duties.[143]

State agents invested in public space as a means to attract the loyalty of an Ottoman citizenry without neglecting the surveillance of Ottoman subjects, in an attempt to

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138. An application of the term "ancien regime" as coined by Tocqueville was suggested by Salzmann 1993, 2004 especially p. 11, 24-28; see also Lafi 2002. To a large extent such a conceptualisation corresponds to the "politics of notables", originally suggested by Hourani 1968; see also Khoury 1990.

139. The nature of the crafts corporations is hotly debated and oscillates between structuralist essentialism or the construction of an eternal present and the heterogeneity of particular peoples' everyday lives and experiences within specific historical contexts. The first view is mainly based on (an ahistorical amalgam of) Syrian sources and put forward by non-Marxist Orientalists, such as Massignon 1934; Lewis 1937; Baer 1964; Rafeq 1983, 1991; Ghazzal 1993 and Marxist historians alike, e.g. Beinin & Lockman 1988; Lockman 1994; Vatter 1995. The latter view has gained importance in recent years, especially in studies on crafts and workers in Egypt, e.g. Ghazaleh 1999; Chalcraft 2004, 2005.

140. Both constructivists and primordialists agree upon the inherent relationship between one-dimensional identities and the nation state. See Smith 1971; Gellner 1983, p. 32-34, 54-55; Smith 1987; Anderson 1991 [1983], Hobsbawm 1992.

141. Meeker 2002, p. XV.

142. The term is borrowed from Hudson 2006, whose focus is limited to the creation of public places through building activities by powerful government agents; see also Weber 1998.

143. Lisān 2 Dec. 1878, p. 4, 19 Dec. 1878, p. 4, 18 Aug. 1879, p. 1, 4 Sep. 1879, p. 3-4, 25 Sep. 1879, p. 3, 9 Sep. 1880, p. 4; Bašīr 23 Jan. 1880, p. 4, FO 195/1262 Damascus 10, Jago to Malet 2 Mar. 1879, Salname Suriye 14 1299 aH [1881/82], p. 100; on this top-down nation building see also Mitchell 1988; Fortna 2002.

internalise newly invented traditions, such as the Fez (*ṭarbūš*), and thus the project of "Ottomanism" amongst the city's population.[144] For the first time imperial jurisdiction addressed a population with the notion of basic equality and common rights, culminating in the short-lived constitution and parliament of 1876-1878. Such ideas had to be communicated to the city's population that was highly impoverished, mostly illiterate, and discontent if not hostile to a state that failed to provide basic security of life and property while imposing heavy taxes and conscription.

One means of communication was the display and emanation of the new images of the state and modernity to the public through establishing new buildings and institutions; another was the staging of affirmative rituals, such as the graduation ceremonies. The occasions and sites for affirmative public rituals employing symbols of the state were plentiful. In the Marǧa area they ranged from the reception of newly appointed government officials[145] and visiting foreigners[146] to the departure of troops and Ottoman imperial festivals marked with canons saluting from the Citadel, such as the Sultan's birthday and his anniversary of accession or the Ramaḍān.[147] Ritual demonstrations of Ottoman legitimacy were performed on occasion of public executions throughout the city[148] or the departure and return of the annual *Ḥaǧǧ* caravan in October and March in the Mīdān.[149] Although the reception of the governor Cevdet Paşa by four grateful Bulgarian refugees on the Marǧa was most likely a staged performance,[150] these ritual public gatherings demonstrate attempts of government agents to internalise a bond of common and unchallenged Ottoman practices.

During the bread riot of March 1878, the protestors did address the state and its representative, acknowledging through their demands the legitimacy of a centralising state in a time when not even enough policing agents were found to prevent their action. Thus, the event can be read as an indicator for the success of an "investment in public space" and Ottoman centralising policies and, hence, part of the modernising narrative. By (allegedly)

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144. Sāmī 1981 [1896], p. 79; Hobsbawm 1987; Anderson 1991 [1983]; p. 155-206; Deringil 2000 [1993], p. 142-143; Qassāṭlī 2004 [1879], p. 217.

145. Qassāṭlī 2004 [1879], p. 154; FO 78/2850 Damascus 5, Jago to Earl of Derby 4 Mar. 1878; Ṯamarāt 7 Mar. 1878, p. 4; Lisān 7 Mar. 1878, p. 4 for the reception of Cevdet Pasha; Lisān 5 Dec. 1878, p. 1; Bašīr 13 Dec. 1878, p. 4; Bašīr 3 Jan. 1879, p. 4 for the reception of Midḥat Pasha; Bašīr 28 Jun. 1882, p. 4.

146. Lisān 25 Sep. 1879, p. 1, 2 Oct. 1879, p. 1; Bašīr 10 Oct. 1879, p. 4; Lisān 20 Sep. 1880, p. 1.

147. Lisān 19 Aug. 1878, p. 1, 29 Aug. 1878, p. 1; Bašīr 20 Sep. 1878, p. 4; Lisān 30 Sep. 1878, p. 1.

148. Baedeker & Socin 1875, p. 488, FO 195/1262 Damascus 10, Jago to Malet 2 Mar. 1879, FO 78/3016 Damascus, Dickson to Buckley 11 Mar. 1879, Bašīr 1 Aug. 1879, p. 3.

149. New York Times 18 Nov. 1876, p. 8, HCPP C.1662 Dickson *Commercial Report Damascus 1875-6*, Mar. 1877, p. 221, Times 5 May 1877, p. 9; Lisān 1 Nov. 1877, p. 4, 11 Feb. 1878, p. 4, 7 Mar. 1878, p. 4, 21 Oct. 1878, p. 4, 17 Feb. 1879, p. 1, 9 Oct. 1879, p. 4, FO 78/2873 Damascus consular 4, Jago to Earl of Derby 2 Feb. 1878, HCPP C.1993 Jago *Commercial Report Damascus 1877*, Apr. 1878, p. 516, FO 195/1262 Damascus 5, Jago to Lord Salisbury 15 Feb. 1879; Mackintosh 1883, p. 39. For pictures of the official departure ceremony and the procession through the Mīdān dating from c.1880 see El-Hage 2000, p. 169, 172.

150. Lisān 1 Apr. 1878, p. 4.

cursing the Sultan and expressing hopes for a Russian victory, an emerging localist discourse is voiced that became manifest in the oppositional placards of the same year and which would eventually culminate in secessionist movements and popular nationalism.

At the same time, the protestors did not loot the barns or otherwise violently force the merchants to sell at lower prices. By appealing to the formal authorities instead of directly addressing the grain wholesale merchants the narrative of a "moral economy of the crowd"[151] and references to the concept of *ḥisba* and the office of the market inspector (*muḥtasib*), are inflicted.[152] Such interpretation is supported by the cited newspaper articles claiming that Cevdet Paşa–implicitly heralded as a just ruler–understood and supported the rightful popular demands for equity against fraudulent grain merchants.

As E.P. Thompson argued, measures adopted to prosecute alleged hoarding in times of scarcity had little effect in lowering prices but provided legitimacy for the authorities.[153] Lacking studies on food prices and bread riots in the late Ottoman Empire or the Arabic-speaking Middle East, one can only speculate whether such rare and not overtly successful contentions functioned to remind the authorities of their possibly vulnerability if they did not adopt measures for the relief of the poor.[154] Yet, it must remain open, whether the protestors made use of long-established discursive structures as suggested by the British vice consul, who claimed that "These sentiments are the echo of public opinion in Damascus expressing itself in a manner peculiar to the people"[155] or whether they adapted to the opportunities laid out by the modernising language of Ottoman reforms. Yet, in a clear diversion from the *ancien régime* or a *politics of notables*, the protestors did not call upon the notables or guilds as mediators between the state, the merchants and the population, although notables did assume this role in easing a butchers' strike in January.[156] or the clashes surrounding the burial of Miḫāʾīl al-Ṣabbāġ in July 1878.

The notables' reluctance to mediate the affair might have been based on an attempt to increase their leverage for future contestations over the power to govern the city vis-à-vis the imperial authorities. On the other hand, some of them most definitely just profited from the high prices, whereas their livelihood was neither addressed nor threatened by the protestors. Possibly de Certeau's terminology of *tactics* that are employed because they promise the best improvement for an unbearable situation at a specific historical context that is itself shaped through social practices or strategies of the more powerful strata, is the best answer to the question why the women took to the streets and how they could do so.

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151. Thompson 1971, 1991; for a critique of the original concept from the realm of Middle East studies see Mitchell 1990.

152. Mottahedeh & Stilt 2003

153. Thompson 1971, p. 88.

154. *Ibid.*, p. 123-126.

155. FO 226/197 Damascus Political 5, *State of Affairs in Damascus*, Jago to Earl of Derby 27 Mar. 1878.

156. HCPP C.1993 Jago *Commercial Report Damascus 1877*, Apr. 1878, p. 514-517; Hourani 1968; Khoury 1990.

Returning to the initial question of "To whom belong the streets?" the cases depicted in this paper illustrate the claim that no definite answer can be given; that the urban process cannot be addressed with a one-dimensional and static picture. All townspeople, the protesting women, the fighting youths, the authors and posters of the placards, the members of local elites, and the authorities, *appropriated* the *public places* and various *public spaces* of the urban society. Some aimed consciously and intentionally at the public sphere, others fought over public places, the third just used certain places for achieving their immediate political aims. All together they produced and represent the "street" of Damascus.

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